

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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UNITED STATES POLICY WITH RESPECT TO FORMOSA

At his press conference today, the Honorable Dean Acheson, Secretary of State, made the following extemporaneous remarks regarding the statement of the President concerning United States policy with respect to Formosa:

I am having this conference this afternoon at the request and at the direction of the President for the purpose of going into the background of the statement which he made this morning on the subject of Formosa.

I should like to make a few remarks on this subject for the purpose of trying to put it in its setting for you and then we will get down into such details as you want to get into.

Why was the statement made at this particular time? That is a question that arises in all of your minds and I want to recall to you that I have said very often in these meetings that the foreign policy of the United States is determined not merely by what the State Department says, or not even by what the President says and not even by what the Congress says but reflects the sum total of the activities, thoughts and speech of the American people. For the past week or ten days, this subject of Formosa has become one of the foremost subjects of discussion throughout the country.

The ordinary processes of life in this town of Washington have made their contribution. We have had leak and counter-leak, gossip and counter-gossip. We have had the contributions of distinguished statesmen in the debate. We have had a great deal of talk in the press and on the radio. Much of that is good and much of that is desirable and all of it has to go on to make the United States the democracy that it is. But we slide very easily from discussion to the statement of fact. I have here a distinguished foreign newspaper dated Friday last (December 30) which announces as a fact that President Truman has decided, et cetera, and et cetera, giving something which President Truman had not decided and had not intended to decide. Therefore, what has occurred is that we have gotten a great deal of confusion in the minds of our own people. We have gotten a great deal of confusion in the minds of foreign people. We have stirred up a good deal of speculation, all of which, if allowed to continue, would be highly prejudicial to the interests of the United States of America. And therefore, it was the President's desire to clarify the situation. He was

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That,

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That, I think, gives you the background as to why it was necessary to make the statement at the present time. It would have been desirable from our point of view if the whole question of the Far East, and all of the parts of the Far East and of Formosa, which after all is a small part of the great question of the Far East, could have been discussed very fully with members of both parties on the Hill before any statement was made. But one has to choose in this life, and it was more important to clarify thinking than it was to go on and have the most desirable of all possible things which is consultation.

Now, getting down to this statement, let's be clear about one or two things. There has been a great deal of amateur military strategy indulged in in regard to this matter of Formosa. The underlying factors in the decision are not in that area. They have to do with the fundamental integrity of the United States and with maintaining in the world the belief that when the United States takes a position it sticks to that position and does not change it by reason of transitory expediency or advantage on its part. If we are going to maintain the free nations of the world as a great unit opposed to the encroachment of Communism and other sorts of totalitarian aggression, the world must believe that we stand for principle and that we are honorable and decent people and that we do not put forward words, as propagandists do in other countries, to serve their advantage only to throw them overboard when some change in events makes the position difficult for us.

We believe in integrity in our foreign relations. We believe also in respect of the integrity of other countries. That is a view not held by some other countries. That is a view not held by some other countries with respect to China.

It is important that our position in regard to China should never be subject to the slightest doubt or the slightest question.

Now, what has that position been? In the middle of the war, the President of the United States, the Prime Minister of Great Britain and the President of China agreed at Cairo that among the areas stolen from China by Japan was Formosa and Formosa should go back to China.

As the President pointed out this morning that statement was incorporated in the Declaration at Potsdam and that Declaration at Potsdam was conveyed to the Japanese as one of the terms of their surrender and was accepted by them and the surrender was made on that basis.

Shortly after that the Island of Formosa was turned over to the Chinese in accordance with the declarations made and with the conditions of the surrender.

The Chinese have administered Formosa for four years. Neither the United States nor any other Ally ever questioned that authority and that occupation. When Formosa was made a province of China nobody raised any lawyers' doubts about that. That was regarded as in accordance with the commitments.

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Now,

China, the forces which undoubtedly will soon be recognized by some other countries, are not friendly to us, and therefore they want to say, "Well, we have to wait for a treaty." We did not wait for a treaty on Korea. We did not wait for a treaty on the Kuriles. We did not wait for a treaty on the islands over which we have trusteeship.

Whatever may be the legal situation, the United States of America, Mr. Truman said this morning, is not going to quibble on any lawyers' words about the integrity of its position. That is where we stand.

Therefore, the President says, we are not going to use our forces in connection with the present situation in Formosa. We are not going to attempt to seize the Island. We are not going to get involved militarily in any way on the Island of Formosa. So far as I know, no responsible person in the Government, no military man has ever believed that we should involve our forces in the Island.

I do not believe that is new policy. It would be new policy if we decided to do that. The President is affirming what so far as I know has been the view of his Administration and the unquestioned view ever since I have known about it.

The President goes on to say that we do not intend to give military assistance or advice, that is materiel and military people, to the forces on Formosa, and he says why. He says that there are resources on that Island which are adequate to enable those on the Island to obtain whatever necessary military supplies they believe they have to have. That is against a background of very considerable gifts on our part at a time when the Government on Formosa was recognized by everybody as the Government of China and was in control of a very large part of China. We gave vast amounts of military equipment to that Government after the war up until 1948. In 1948 another Act of Congress was passed and 125 million dollars of military equipment was turned over.

That is not where the difficulty lies in maintaining the Island by the forces on it. It is not that they lack rifles or ammunition or that, if they do have any deficiencies in any of those, they cannot purchase what they need. That is not the trouble. The trouble lies elsewhere, and it is not the function of the United States nor will it or can it attempt to furnish a will to resist and a purpose for resistance to those who must provide for themselves.

That is the background of this statement. The President goes on to say that in regard to economic assistance which we have been furnishing, we will furnish it for as long as the legislation that Congress has passed permits us to. Whether that legislation will be extended or not, I don't wish to prejudice this afternoon. That is a matter for discussion with the leaders, and for action by the Congress.

We have been, through the ECA, conducting programs one of which has resulted in all the fertilizer necessary for the spring crop on the Island of Formosa. Others have been the purchase of necessary oil for refining on the Island and for running the power plants and other things on the Island. Other programs have had to do with keeping their power plants and other factories in repair and in operation. Those are going forward....

Now

Now those are the main statements of background which I wish to make. I am informed by Mr. McDermott that some of you wish me to say what if any significance is to be attached to the sentence in the next-to-last paragraph of the statement which says, "The United States has no desire to obtain special rights or privileges or to establish military bases on Formosa at this time." The question is, what does that phrase "at this time" mean. That phrase does not qualify or modify or weaken the fundamental policies stated in this declaration by the President in any respect. It is a recognition of the fact that in the unlikely and unhappy event that our forces might be attacked in the Far East the United States must be completely free to take whatever action in whatever area is necessary for its own security.

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